

THE YALE SERIES

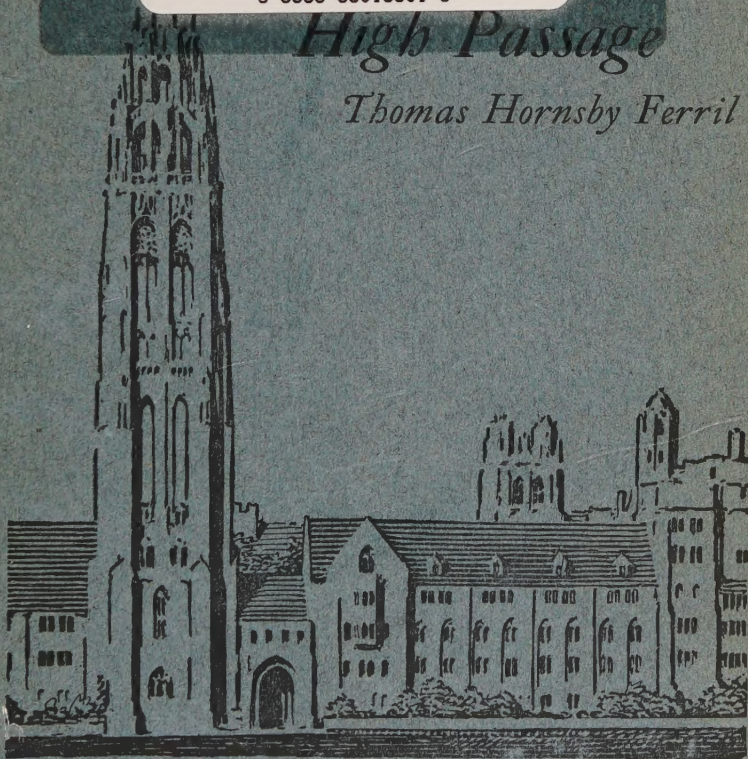
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OF YOUNGER POETS

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THE *Yale Series of Younger Poets* is designed to afford a publishing medium for the work of young men and women who have not yet secured a wide public recognition. It will include only such verse as seems to give the fairest promise for the future of American poetry—to the development of which it is hoped that the Series may prove a stimulus. Communications concerning manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor of the *Yale Series of Younger Poets*, in care of the Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

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High Passage



THOMAS HORNSBY FERRIL



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TO
ANNE MILROY FERRIL

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HIGH PASSAGE.

WHAT pure coincidences were the day the bee
Crossed the black river and came floating further West:
An old man felt no symbol streaming o'er his head,
But crushing English roses in his hunting vest
As if the flowers were there, spoke to his dusty son
Of this and that which he had written in his will,
And prattled on of England till the weary boy
Grew fearful of what lay behind each westerling hill,
And watched horizons bobbing through the oxen horns,
Like circles screwed against his own identity,
Which thundered in his ears and through the wagon wheels
To roar beneath the silent passage of a bee.

The day the bee flew further West a Blackfoot girl
Laughed when her mother, mumbling of a buffalo bull,
Told of a maid that once a bull had wooed away;
Also that day a Ute boy topped a brown armful
Of wood with a gnarled snow-snake of the winter games,
Which now, in summer calm, could kindle evening fire;
So twilight fell across the world under the bee,
Whose flight sang down to peace, and while the moon rose
higher,
The nodding prairie drowsed, for still unmeasured miles
Lay silent in the grass between the fires of those
Who trusting bulls would learn to fear a bee,
And lonely men remembering a droning rose.

AMERICAN TESTAMENT.

WHERE were their myths, if these were beautiful?
Was Daphne there, beloved of Apollo?

Kentucky was too dark and red with blood,
But Amos cut a path that Ruth could follow.

If these were bold in dreams, what Centaur's child
As fair as Jason ever led them on?

Job, in his bull-boat on the brown Missouri,
Slept while Ezekiel pushed a pole till dawn.

Calypso where? Was Niobe among them
With sorrow singing in her sons and daughters?

Isaiah, wounded by the Arkansas,
Heard Ezra's oxen drowning in the waters.

How were they beautiful without Diana?
Was there a valley of un waking youth?

Jude took a squaw out of the Taos moonlight,
Joel bought a lover with a grizzly tooth.

If there was courage in their brutal being,
Was it not ugly gods that drove them on?

At eighty Daniel whistled hymns in Juarez,
And snow-white Joshua reached Oregon.

CANVAS LIGHT.

A Prairie Song of Farewell.

THE light that comes through canvas
Soon will glow upon your face,
Where your cheeks are now red roses,
Yellow ones will take their place.

Under canvas noon is amber,
Less than sunlight, never shade,
Canvas is the restless cloth
Where lures are spun and songs are made.

Cloth that sheltered Rome at pleasure,
Cloth that blew old ships to sea,
Moonlit tents for desert dancers,
This, my love, your canopy.

Canvas is the rover's awning,
Roofs for prairie wagons drawn
Thin between the sky and peril,
Dimming twilight, doubting dawn.

Canvas of adventure woven,
Night and day shall guard your head,
You will hear it singing, singing,
Like a lover, o'er your bed.

Now farewell, the horn is sounded,
Cheeks of rose are yellow gold,
Go your way, I know not whither,
In the canvas light of old.

OLD MAPS TO OREGON.

THEIR maps, when they had maps, were charted well
With names stretching two hundred miles or more,
For timid wives to read the night before
The latch-string on the front door slowly fell,
Leaving them, just a moment, staring hard
Against the door, as if a door could close
Tighter the last time than the doors of those
Who had no prairie wagons in the yard.

Although the scrawny legends overlapped
The wilderness with bitter high deceit,
Such wives at dusk could still smile when they came
Within a mile or two of what was mapped,
Dreaming of harbor, while thick oxen feet
Drummed toward some empty place that had a name.

MOUNTAIN RIVERS.

Arid Channel.

THIS is the river's skeleton,
Bone white, desert dry,
The rocks are skulls with moss for hair
That moves when the wind is high;
This is the outworn channel,
The yellow shadows slant
Through sandy crypts of oven rocks
Where pallid lizards pant.

River Gods.

The river gods roam in the sweet wild mint,
Down the silver dark where the bright fish leap
At the amber moons of the faraway pools
In the hour when the willow children sleep.

Wind Flood.

Sleepers who wake in the midnight roar
Of the rising wind in the pines will dream
Through the staring black of a cabin wall,
On the black flood-call of a rising stream,
But the dappled fawn where the birches quiver
Knows the roar of the pines from the roar of the river.

ONE MOUNTAIN HOUR.

High in the Sun.

I AM so high in the windy sun
On the rock-boned back of the highest thing,
That the mountains under me, every one,
Are but wrinkled gestures westering,
. . . Green-robed those little mountains pass
Like rabbits under piles of grass.

Labor.

The undelivered sky, vein-ripped in pain
Of crackled lightning underneath the skin,
Still holds her throbbing thunder-burden in,
Too drugged to hate or fear or love the rain.

Revelation.

Over the moth-white vapor of hail,
Clinging the world where the storm had run,
I saw a thousand mountains rise,
Where the sun had let me see but one.

Rainbow.

Indigo-slippered, acre-wide,
Curving the mountain meadowside,
Walking the silver hill with me,
I saw you step in the aspen tree . . .

HIS YEARS AND MINE.

I THINK the years came newer and grew whole when he was young,
I read it in his letters and his portrait on the wall . . .
He jingles through the starlight in his creaky-runnered pung,
His years come slow and mystical, he loves and counts them all,
To the rhythm of old worlds that swing into his horses' feet,
Over stake-and-rider fences, deep in snow and bittersweet.

*But my years come flying fast,
I must hurry while they last,
Ships of mine are homing soon
Through the chalice of the moon,
Hurry, hurry, ships at sea,
Bring my treasure home to me.*

I think the watchful angels on the tallow fringe of night,
When he waited in the beeches with his rifle in his hand,
To hear the twilight clatter full of sharp blue geese in flight,
Saw a mute and happy statue, too content to understand,
Saw unfinished years, like twisted shadows, whipping down the West,
Pausing now, and growing beautiful and long within his breast.

*Hurry, dying amber corn,
Winter wheat comes with the morn,
Hurry, hurry, wheat for clover,
All the world the wind blows over,
O but were my triumph worth
Years like his across the earth.*

COWHERD.

THE peach and wine-red brush is April ripe
Behind the tree where this dark cowherd sits
To suck the hissing dottle of his pipe,
And twist a week-old paper into bits;
And what the patient cyclorama fits
Into the dusty dreaming of his stare
Is less that there are cattle than that it's
Uncomfortable to keep on sitting there;
Nor would it matter if the cattle were
Apollo's with Prince Hermes singing by . . .
Or even his, with all the sun and air
And land that he could see against the sky,
Though they are wandering prisoners, and he,
But for himself upon the ground, is free.

THE UNCUT PAGE.

THIS quaint old thing . . . tooled leather back and all,
Was his: firm-fisted name, and then, *His Book*;
Great-grandfathers were so, it seems, the hall
Is full with oval frames and dust; they look
Queer nowadays—that face, as if it took
A lot of breath to be a good wheelwright,
But this—he heard stars filter through the brook,
While wondering on wood pigeons in the night;
He pressed to know and love the eager might
Of flowers and worms—a poet, if you will,
Who lived in beauty's print and beauty's flight,
And knew his books quite through; I think that still
This uncut page you see . . . I've marked the place
Holds that strange worry in his picture face.

THE DRAGON MASTER.

H_E built his hut on a beetling cliff,
And far above the plain as if
The highest moon could hardly rise
Unto the level of his eyes;
His crags are dragons that tried to creep
From the prairie sea and went to sleep
With heads uphill and backs worn thin
By the whetted wind they burrowed in.

At twilight where he goes to sit,
Unerring incidences fit
In such a way that when the sun
Has capped the foothills, one by one,
They sink like distances of scales
On flat collapsing dragon tails,
And he stares at them absently,
Like old Aegeus, out to sea.

Dissimilar is he and odd
Enough to hold himself a god
O'er men who fear a dragon's head,
And throng on his dead tail instead;
He sees fat cities glow afar,
Of men who never scorned a star,
He's old and mad and stark . . . but then
He looks downhill at moons and men.

BOB FORD IN ATTICA.

A Song of Nemesis.

COLE Younger, Quantrell, Jesse James
Shall never ride again,
For there are wires and phonographs
And fonts of type and men
Who pigeon-hole a fearful song
To keep it safe and true and strong.

*"It was on Saturday night, Jesse was at home,
Talking with his family brave,
Robert Ford came along like a thief in the night
And laid poor Jesse in his grave."*

There were no facts in Rhamnus,
But there were songs of fear,
Old as the oaks where robbers fell
On pilgrims year by year,
Who prayed at shrines like simple folks
To Nemesis, dread child of Nox.

*"This song was made by Billy Gashade,
As soon as the news did arrive,
He said there was no man with the law in his hand,
Who could take Jesse James when alive."*

Ten cubits high in Rhamnus,
And bleak as a dappled bull,
Stood Robert Ford, like a woman hewn
Of marble beautiful,
And old men eating apples choked
On what his death-white eyes invoked.

ON SAVING TIME.

A Song of the Pony Express.

HORSEMEN who ride till morning,
Galloping, galloping on,
Believe that the end of riding
Is something more than dawn,
And perhaps it is, and perhaps it is
A phantom that night has drawn.

They killed Bart Riles on May sixteen,
But Melville Baughn and Johnny Fry
And Pony Bob and John Burnett
Rode for a while across the sky
As Buffalo Bill does yet.

Now all are gone, perhaps they've met
Such men as galloped far away,
As messengers for Ghengis Khan,
More than three hundred miles a day,
Some twenty to each man.

And no one knows, for all are dead,
If any Tartar horseman said
To Melville Baughn or Johnny Fry,
Or others who came loping by:

*"If sleep, like death, was either this or that,
Where this was dreams and that was nothing, why
Did you ride wakefully all night to reach
A dream . . . and why did I?
My lover's name was Golden Bells, she died
Asleep one night while I was riding far,
And judging from her face at dawn she dreamed
Of nothing or a star."*

STUFFED PASSENGER PIGEON.

Hanna's Wasteful Son.

EZEKIEL HANNA was a man of thrift,
At pigeon time he roundly scored his son
For laying by his cudgel, net and trap,
For fun of shooting pigeons with his gun.

Abel Hosmer's Harvest.

We used to stick to Abel Hosmer's trees,
Then he and his would come and beat us down,
And rip our throats to get the warm pine seed
That he could dry and pack and sell in town.

Nestor Burton's Bad Year.

That spring the roof of Nestor Burton's barn
Became a cyclone's melancholy joke;
That fall the prating pigeons came in hordes
And crushed his twenty stalwart trees of oak.

Ed Hoback's Pigs.

We hid the sunlight from Ed Hoback's club,
He swung the club, we fell like fluttering wheat,
At noon he paused, knee-deep in broken doves,
A lawn of broken doves for pigs to eat.

Extinct.

Your little symbols soon go flickering out,
Chips from the shooting star are soon plowed under,
The god-tree dies, the pale dove blows away,
You pass the haunted well-head without wonder.

MOONSET IN BAYOU SALADE.

Meadow Larks.

Snow peaks are flowing
Down silver grooves
Into dark tundra
Pitted with hooves.

Out of the drowsing world,
Hoof-packed and frozen,
Something is pulling
Warm flutes by the dozen.

Doubt What You See.

Those are the mountains,
Believe them, they are,
But nobody knows
How far.

Try it with fingers,
Let them extend,
Do they feel blue
At the end?

Numb Harps.

Now turn around,
Touch the horns of the moon,
Pink and brittle,

Feel, they are sharp
As the yucca that pricks
At the ivory bull,

Now touch the ground,
Pull a willow from June,
Bend it a little,

See, 'tis a harp,
Hear how it clicks,
Icily dull.

FALLING LEAVES.

Topsy Turvy.

A NIGHT when the wind is blowing,
The trees turn upside down,
Till whining roots clutch at the moon
With random talons of brown.

Roots in the air will knock and saw
Till the moon freeze white, but in the earth
Swaying boughs begin to weave
Green hymns of birth.

In the Sexton's Shed.

The sexton burned the summer shade,
The shade was leaves, the leaves were dead,
Then placed his rake near by the spade
That hung on a peg on the door of his shed.

The rake stood still as the scythe behind
The broken bell on the silent floor,
But day and night the autumn wind
Rattled the spade against the door.

OCTOBER ASPENS.

Noon at Evening.

WHAT if the days be short
And night come soon,
See, through the purple dusk, the aspen hill
Is copper noon.

Threshold of Numbers.

As he rests, panting on his axe, the man is less
A man than some worn register of sun and wind,
Rock-boned, pine-lunged, strung taut of sinewed wilderness,
With tunes of storm fringing the furrows of his mind ;
His swinging haft and slicing steel, shining with juice,
Have struck through powdery bark, green flesh, brown heart,
Since dawn to build his aspen cords for winter use ;
All day he slowly hews the sweet wild trunks apart,
And slowly counts, as much in dreaming rhythm as awake,
The plunging circles of his axe—one . . . two . . . three . . .
four,

Or one or five—whate'er it takes to cleave a break,
Humming a phrase he may never have heard before ;
Then, counting trunks into small blocks, he loses track
Of all the strokes he numbered as he cut each one ;
Yet feels a strange relation stretching idly back
Through all he's cleft and piled to season in the sun ;
Just what his biting axe divides and multiplies,
Seems aspen wood and more, seems vague and true and old,
But stays unmeasured when he scans with measuring eyes
Enough cords in equation with the coming cold.

Christmas Trees.

The tall green peaks are Christmas trees,
With yellow aspen candles set
To glow amid dark mysteries
Of gifts unopened yet,
And all the children of the wind
Prowl through to see what they can find.

Told by a Voyageur.

Christ was nailed to an aspen cross,
The aspens are afraid of death,
His lightning soon will strike them down,
They shake and hold their breath.

WIND AT TIMBERLINE.

HUR and Deas are Irish winds
That blow from the east and the cloven south,
In a purple mist and a golden robe,
Woven of rain and drouth.

In Africa the hot north wind
Is flecked with dark and no one knows
How far it blows in Africa
Between the lotus and the rose.

The blackbird in the drooping rods
Of yellow ash in Normandy,
Pipes in the wind a Druid witch
Sold to a ship at sea.

For every wind around the world
Is one of eight whose name is borne
In whatsoever tongue a man
Can hope and be forlorn.

But one is high enough to blow
Above old gods that had a name,
And it is cold enough to burn
A tree to frozen flame.

And it is nameless save to him
Whose eyes can read a twisted word
In writhing boughs and sinews,
Never spoken, never heard.

And lest he know why trees and men
Must die the closer to the sun,
Let him beware what name he reads
Into the nameless one.

TROPHY.

HE found the skull of a mountain ram
And painted the white skull black,
And tied it high on a willow pole
That the wind blew fro and back.

The black skull on the willow pole
Played like a swallow in the wind,
It nibbled stars with half a jaw,
With half a jaw it grinned.

It grinned at the soil where the willow stood,
At the black soil rich and beautiful,
The soil grown black with bones of things,
Of trees and leaves, and many a skull.

The black skull grinned at the joke of soil,
But rain can wash a coat of black,
And wind can blow a willow down
If lambs need what the taproots lack.

JUDGING FROM THE TRACKS.

MAN and his watchful spirit lately walked
This misty road . . . at least the man is sure,
Because he made his tracks so visible,
As if he must have felt they would endure.

There was no lovely demon at his side,
A demon's tracks are beautiful and old,
Nor is it plausible a genius walked
Beside him here, because the prints are cold.

And judging from the tracks, it's doubtful if
A guardian angel moved above his head,
For even thru the mist it can be seen
That he was leading and not being led.

THE EMPIRE SOFA.

THEY could grow used to seeing bones
Of buffalo and sometimes men,
They could grow strong on cracking dreams
Of gold to give them rest again,
They could pit happy years to come
Against the prairie's timeless length,
They had illusions that could calm
The frantic restlessness of strength.

But things like this they had to pass,
Sunk in the sand on the Arkansas,
This rosewood sofa that clutched the sun
With every foot a gryphon's claw;
They saw it shining far ahead,
They turned to see it far behind,
And dreamed of men who dared not lose
The things they dared not hope to find.

One wagon whistled *Money Musk*,
Another chattered into laughter,
But no one spoke to anyone
About what they were going after;
An hour creaked by and dreams came back,
The wagons talked with even breath
And grew secure the more they passed
The more familiar forms of death.

BOOKMARKS.

A BOOKMARK for an album such as this,
Should be a ribbon with a cross-stitched phrase,
Pressed neatly into Milton's hymns of praise,
Yet here is none, but in this book of his,
That crossed the prairies with him long ago,
I find pale blades of buffalo grass to tell
Sweet pages where he could love Philomel,
And Phyllida and Cynthia and Chloe.
Here is a wedding song, stained by a leaf
Of mountain aspen, plucked when June was ripe;
If he marked other verse, I find no more,
But on one page, attuned to death and grief,
Are ashes from the embers of his pipe,
That must have spilled and did not reach the floor.

PRAIRIE SCHOONER CHILD.

THE sky-fixed buzzard, like a kite,
Stood still for half an hour,
He thought you left the wagon train
To find a prairie flower.

The hobbled oxen swung their necks
Above the thorny grass,
The gritty mustangs flipped their tails,
And stared and let you pass.

Behind you hearty voices rose,
The dusk was dry and sweet,
On level wings of opal smoke
You smelled the roasting meat.

The lute-backed buzzard now could see
You creeping on the ground
Among the sage clumps, but he could
Not tell what you had found.

No one had told the buzzard that
If you lie down and look
At sage brush long enough it seems
Like oak trees in the book . . .

Like tiny oaks with twisted trunks,
And leaves as thick as June,
From which the prairie fairies peep
Sometimes to see the moon.

NINETY MILES EAST OF THE RANGE.

THEN quietly he told me that his wife
Was getting queer, and asked if it was strange
For one who lived on prairies all her life
To want a house where she could see the range.

He said she hummed around a lot and walked
At sundown through the gate and up the draw,
And watched the sun go down, but never talked
Much any more or told him what she saw ;

Except when once she said 'twas sort of fun
To try to guess what colors there would be
Along the mountains with the setting sun,
On days the range was clear enough to see.

He said it was a funny thing because
Out there, as nearly as he could recall,
The mountains were so far, there hardly was
One day in five you could see them at all.

SCIENCE CAME WEST.

THEY weren't all fighting men, some traded knives,
Tobacco, scarlet cloth, vermillion dye,
And rum and cakes of salt . . . and some their lives
For aster pollen and a butterfly,
Or for a star against a mountain sky
That fixed the longitude and latitude
Into a crumpled note-book carried by
A thirsty mule that crumpling would be food;
They weren't all fighting men, some gave their blood
To christen wormwood after Artemis,
To pole a perogue through a stinking flood,
To watch a warbler in the clematis . . .
Now cutting blossoms, now dead manes and tails
For girths to bind fresh horses to the trails.

MISSING MEN.

WIND River, Sweetwater, Yellowstone,
Rosebud, Powder, Green,
Where are the men who wandered away,
And never again were seen ?
Where are their rifles, knives and traps ?
Last night they sat around the fire,
The air was sweet with evergreen,
The air was wild with brier.

How many times did they lie down
To drink with palms crushed in the sand,
And bodies arched above that world
They clutched with either hand ?
How many times did they drink so,
Before the time they did not rise,
And felt no sand in either hand,
No rushes in their eyes ?

They say a man lies like a log,
So weather-beaten in the grass,
That men pay no more heed to him
Than to live men who pass ;
He's like a log a little while,
And soon is vanished much the same
As others who live long enough
Quite to forget his name.

THE HANDS OF JOSEPH SMITH.

THE hands of Joseph Smith soon ceased to twitch,
The day they stormed the jail and shot him dead,
His hands stayed warm as what he lay upon,
So did his boots, his pocket knife and head.

The hands of Brigham Young were still alive
With singing blood, but Joseph Smith's were not,
Because they now lay still as what they touched,
No cooler than the jail, but just as hot.

The hands of Joseph Smith had fondled stars,
At dawn they'd often pinched a candle wick,
They'd beaten devils with witch-hazel rods,
And found gold treasure with a forked peach stick.

The hands of Joseph Smith had known the weight
Of lyric seer-stones lifted from a well,
They had pulled angels out of common trees,
They had stroked Lucifer and Azrael.

The hands of Joseph Smith had lifted lids
Of little children perished in the night,
They had thrown bedding into oxen carts
To lead a host of saints in holy flight.

The hands of Joseph Smith had pawed each text:
Christ had three brides, and more had Solomon;
His hands blessed hidden curves of burning flesh,
Sealing for Heaven many into one.

In Carthage jail the hands of Joseph Smith
Lay pallid in the shadows, at a loss
For gesturing . . . like two hands of the six:
Warm as the nails, no cooler than the cross.

WAGONS MOVING EAST.

"We have thrown away our bodies and will not turn back!"

THEY threw themselves to the red pipe stone,
Their bodies to the jewel weed,
Their bodies to the primrose plains,
Their bodies to the yucca seed,
And strode like things that knew the way,
And kept their backs against the dawn,
And rode like disembodied souls,
Forever facing Oregon;
They called a Blackfoot brave a thief,
As if a thief were less than death;
Night loaned them stars that had been theirs,
Dawn gave slow hearts and even breath,
But noon came thru the yellow dust
To beat their pulses into song
That moved unsung, and afternoon
Was but a cadence groping strong.

But there were wagons moving east,
That must be met like fire and flood,
And in them Disillusion rode,
Reclaiming cast-off flesh and blood,
And in them Disillusion rode
To find itself in the jewel weed,
Its body in the red pipe stone,
Its body in the yucca seed.

THE MIDNIGHT RAINBOW.

SLOWLY the midnight rainbow grew until
It seemed a tinted arch above a stage,
On which moved neither pomp nor equipage,
But mountain night and sheep upon the hill.

The foreman knocked upon the boss's door,
As hard as if the Belgian mare had foaled,
Then both stared at the sky and neither told
The other he had seen the like before.

The boss saw the full moon and then explained
That probably it caused a rainbow that
Had formed across the cañon meadow-flat,
On up the river where it must have rained.

He asked the foreman then whether or not
He could recall the silly sailor rhyme
About what rainbows meant at such a time,
The foreman said he knew but had forgot.

Just then the giant Belgian stallion neighed,
And though they knew he always neighed at night,
It seemed to them as if he roared in fright,
And each man thought the other was afraid.

The boss then joked about the rainbow's end,
But half in earnest said it looked as if
It rooted in the aspens on the cliff
Above the ice dam on the river bend.

The foreman thought so too, and nearly spoke
Of walking up to see if, just for fun,
It started where they thought it had begun,
But kept his peace and chuckled at the joke.

The thing grew brighter, indigo to blue,
Amber to orange . . . into violet,
Orchid to purple . . . salmon . . . brighter yet,
And all the while the great moon wallowed through.

The stallion screamed and thudded in his stall,
Each knew the stallion could not see the sky,
Each heard him scream again . . . and wondered why,
And if it was a rainbow, after all.

Both paled . . . the boss then said he thought he'd been
A fool to stand so long out in the cold,
The foreman told him he was getting old,
And sneered . . . but also wanted to go in.

They stood as fixed as men who doubt their lives,
Spellbound as eyes that drift in idle thinking
Up velvet underthroats of horses drinking,
And for no reason, dream of whetted knives.

The rainbow waned, while in the foreman's grip
Quivered a two-by-four, nailed to the gate,
The boss turned white, repressing fear with hate,
Stared at the bright ice-hook, and bit his lip.

The rainbow disappeared . . . each went his way,
The foreman passed a shoat he might have kicked,
The boss woke up his wife, and grinned, and flicked
The light . . . she snarled . . . and he had naught to say.

STREETS DUE WEST.

THE end of every street a hill,
The top of every hill a line
Too indistinct in blue and blue
For any to divine,
Were just as strange as any street
That ended in a gleaming sail,
Or any wall ten chariots wide,
Sung in a golden tale.

All streets end in morality
Of fables told in human span,
Where three score years and ten are roofs
And spires to measure man,
Save these that end in blue and blue,
In peak and peak and sky and sky,
At seven on an April night,
Immeasurably high.

WIND JOKE.

His life was made of efforts that converged
Into accomplishments he did not plan,
But tolerant of circumstance he urged
Himself to hold this true of any man.

The twisted fruit his ordered orchard bore
Seemed natural when he could recollect
The dove-tailed sequences that went before,
But he found prescience not in retrospect.

Things undesired came straight and definite,
While he, full conscious, labored to invest
Himself in fresh pursuits, lest he admit
That fate had found him worthy of the jest.

'Twas thus he dreamed to cap the jest of fate
With a refinement his reflection gave,
And phrased his jest into a postulate
That must bewilder fate beyond the grave.

Unto the four loose winds that wend the air
He pledged his ashes from a peak be tossed,
To do their will and float him everywhere,
Scattered to every sky, dissolved and lost.

The pledge was kept, and when the urn was spilled,
There came a single, stiff, quick, puffy breeze,
That shot his tight-caked ashes, unfulfilled,
Straight as a lumpy cloud of honey bees.

ORIENTATION.

My host, within this cabin where he dwelt,
Had covered all the sagging walls with his
Old Sunday supplements, a grizzly pelt
And crackled maps from steamship companies.

He saw me noticing his walls and said
That lately he had got the biggest kick
Out of the maps that he could see from bed
On lazy mornings or when he was sick.

He said he never missed the mountain range
Till he spent weeks in bed, from a relapse,
During which time he figured out some strange
Ideas about the mountains on the maps.

The mountains of the world most always lie
From north to south, and seldom east to west;
And this set forth, he tried to tell me why
It seemed to him in bed that this was best.

A range, he said, ought never to extend
From east to west on a line with the sun,
Because the sun could only hit each end,
One, morning, then at dusk, the other one.

A mountain range must be just like a wall,
One side part time in shadow, one in light,
Or folks, he said, would not see it at all,
Or dream of what it hid beyond their sight.

He told me that this mountain idea got
Mixed up with God and was hard to explain,
But that he thought he could recall a lot
About it if he should be sick again.

HERMIT.

H_E idly traced a square upon the grass,
Under Polaris and a blue pine tree,
And wondered on what might have come to pass,
If Christ, like him, had lived to seventy.

JUPITER AT BEER SPRINGS.

"The night was very still and cloudless, and I sat up for an observation of the first satellite of Jupiter . . . but fell asleep at the telescope."—*Fremont's Journal*, 1843.

J OHN CHARLES FREMONT waited for Jupiter,
But fell asleep before the first bright limb
Shone down his glass, while stars in feather and fur,
Instead of Jupiter, rolled over him.

Over this white sage Idaho would be,
Wagons would trail the dreamer's telescope,
The stars of old Chaldean prophecy
Would warn the crane to warn the antelope.

But here no Jupiter . . . Sky Women talked,
With crows for chins and blue stripes on their heads,
They circled round the Star-That-Never-Walked,
And stroked the lizards in the lava beds.

No Jupiter . . . but Coyote in the sky
Limped like a squaw and sprinkled river spray
To feed young stars, and letting ashes fly
From Walking Stick, renewed the Milky Way.

Blowing their wingbone whistles at the moon,
These holy stars marched over lodge and hill,
They flaunted fur and feathers while he slept,
And sang of wars, and he was very still.

Needless his Jupiter in Idaho,
For young stars in the aged pageantry
Wear peacock plumes and garish calico,
Stolen from men who came across the sea.

SPACE—AFTER SUPPER.

THOSE things beyond the shingled roof,
—They bend in through the glass,—
Are stars that I would sit behind
To watch the far worlds pass,
While mother slices kumquats in
The hair-cloth rocking-chair,
And father hums and crooks his knees
To win at Solitaire.

I can but puff and puff and puff
Against the sombre pane,
The mellow whorl drifts out, around,
And circles back again,
As if the window's threshold were
Quite easy stuff to pass,
Until it finds what, seeming naught,
Is firm, forbidding glass.

I am some better by a bit,
I hold a pathway through;
I touch the things above the roof,
Beyond, I feel the blue;
But farther treading falls away,
I cannot lift the cloak,
So . . . back with cards and kumquats I
Am pretty much like smoke.

SONG FOR A CLIMBER.

WITH the blast of the peaks in my armpits,
My hands stretched to the sun,
It's a fierce way up and a strong day up,
And a high course to be run . . .
A camp-bird's shadow whips my face,
The bird has reached a higher place,
Up . . . on . . . up.

The sky above is a burning plate,
The range below, a dappled grid,
Old gorgeousness of snow in blue,
'Neath which the world is hid,
This pine once combed the lightning's hair
And fell to be my lichened stair,
On . . . up . . . to where?

Where the man trail ends in flying mist,
Where the soul trail tracks up amethyst,
Where all is high and nothing higher,
Worlds below and skies of fire.

HILLBOUND.

UNDER the shrill cool quivering of mountain stars
He lay in boyish hate: hate for the time-ribbed scars,
The bloodless crags, the stupid flocks, the wanton birds,
Hate for his mountain folk, their ways, their loves, their herds,
The rough-hewn women of their kind, the dew-plumed sage,
Hate for the space about, the endless space, the age;
Nor would he open up his eyes lest he should see
More things to hate: some shaded voice, some mocking tree,
Some dread assurance that the irons of mountain birth
Would chain him hillbound till he ebbd again to earth.
At length, too full of fearing hate for hating more,
He rose, beastlike, and shook as if to fling the roar
Of silence from his heart, and struck a jagged trail,
And climbed the black unraveling thing up to a pale
Old amber height, and stood there in the winged wind,
As he had done long nights before, and let his mind
Dream o'er the blue plain far below and out to where
A glow of checkered city lit the distant air,
And while he watched, the far-off city lights grew dim,
And slowly drew away . . . and drew away from him,
As they had always drawn away when he had stood
Upon the clutching crag with longing in his blood;
And in that jeweled far-away were burning eyes
Of one much like himself, sweeping his prisoned skies
To see the peaks, rising like keen-edged silver helms,
Splitting and shivering golden moonlight down themselves,
Forever slipping back the more his longing grew,
Vanishing . . . vanishing into the open blue,
Leaving him hopeless, broken, in the city's clasp,
Like some old withered mandarin, panting to grasp
A snowy blooming girl who meets his gravid glance
With white withdrawal and sweeps on in ghostly dance.

TO ANACHRONISM.

WE shall not be remembered. If we are,
Let there be hope in this: the world is new,
So new indeed that we may be confused
With men who feared a warlike god and who
In penitence built gray cathedral spires . . .
Confused within the myth-bright circle of
Bold kings who killed with quicker strokes than ours,
Such heroes as with high Achilles strove
Against a city and a city's gods.

We shall not be remembered. If we are,
Let time's dispersion of the year and hour
Join us to shepherd men who knew a star
Was holier than we who measure it,

But never hear it singing to its kind . . .
Men who raised altars to the sun and wind,
Who filled the shadows of the misty wood
With creatures made for love and nothing more;
Who, fearing more than we, were less afraid,
Though there were seas beyond which lay no shore.

We shall not be remembered. If we are,
The world is new, so new and so unused
To far remembering, take hope in this:
We and the elder dead may be confused.

INSCRIPTION.

WARRIORS who sleep
Not one but seven cities deep,
Are singing still,
Stronger than we
Who lie within this hill.

Lovers whose lust
Called ships to sea and men to dust
Are heard above
Our stone-cut names
Where slow brown mosses move.

If you who dare
No more than we in love and war,
Dare faith in fame,
Come when the moon is high
And try to read a name.

ANSWERS.

THE poets sing of I so much,
Who is this I?

Whoever sees, as through their souls, the world,
And hears the sky.

To you the poets write so much,
And who are you?
Whoever listens at the gates of night
For what rings through.

Of beauty poets tell so much,
Why speak they so?
Because they know it is, yet where nor why,
They never know.

Blind words the poets use so much,
Why are they blind?
Such fetters they must wear to grope for what
They cannot find.

If poets wander in the dark,
Why must they speak?
To light the lamp for men too strong to know
That men are weak.

How do the poets know so well
That they are right?
They never know, yet ever feel the truth
In second sight.

Then who will prove that what is sung
Be more than breath?
None but such dead as none can prove
Had smiled at death.

BRIDE.

AFTER the turgid incidence and when
The last mad whispering had darkly blown
Away, letting the woods be real again,
He propped his elbow on a lichened stone.
"I've climbed that mountain many times alone,"
He said at length. She stared, then asked him how
One felt at timberline. He answered "One
Feels much as we do now," remembering snow
That must have cooled whatever long ago
Had cracked the rocks with terrible ecstasy.
"It's not so wild up there, you feel as though
Something were finished. You're at peace with sky
And earth, as we are now." She pointed where
The peak seemed highest, whispering "Take me there."

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